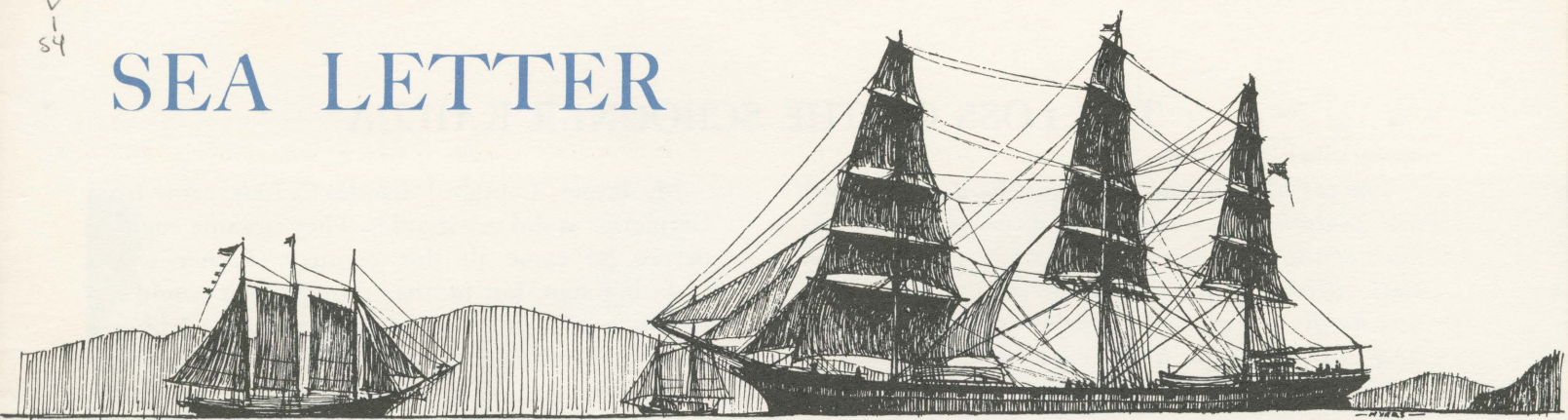


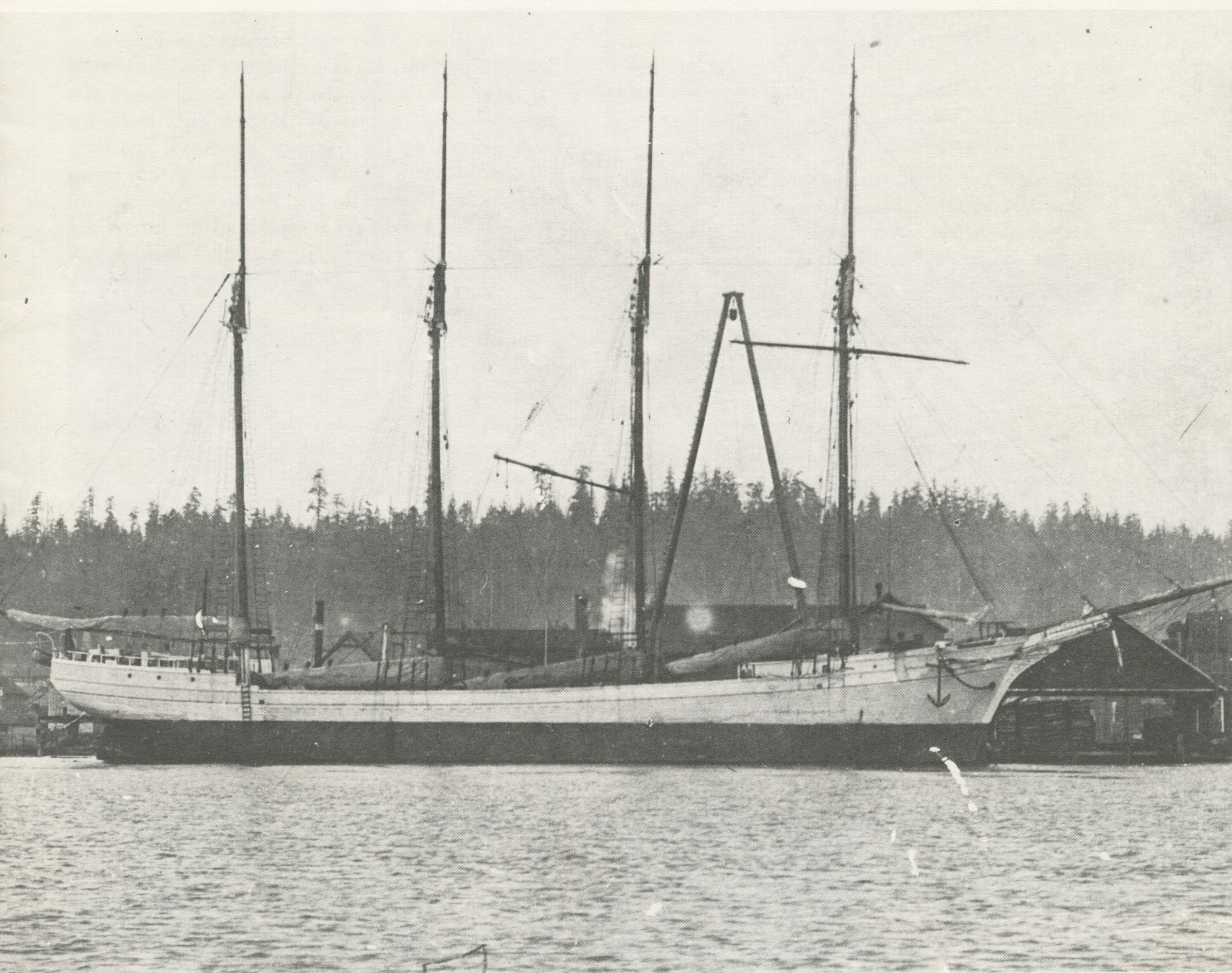
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SEA LETTER



OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME MUSEUM

Summer 1976



Courtesy Mrs. Henry Voelker

KAILUA — 736 tons

Built at Hoquiam, Washington — 1901

Sunk off Kyuquot, Vancouver Island — 1904

THE LOSS OF THE SCHOONER KAILUA

The lot of a seaman in sail was hard, unforgiving and materially unrewarding. Even well into the 20th century seamen were generally cast as second class citizens in the eyes of their fellow man. Pay was hardly adequate to support a family and the long absences from home served poorly to keep a family together.

Captains, at the top rung of the seaman's profession, were given awesome responsibility, and they operated under a lonely routine of constant stress from the hazards and risks of their calling. Success was expected, but failure in judgment or bad luck often meant the ultimate sacrifice for ship and crew. In such an eventuality, a seaman's family was usually left with little to show for a lifetime of hardship and sacrifice to make ends meet.

This is the narrative of one captain's family whose breadwinner did not come home from a voyage. The narrator is Mrs. Henry Voelker of St. Helena, who was Christine Lass, the second daughter of Captain Johannes Lass. The interview is one of hundreds of oral histories that have been taken down over the years by Director Karl Kortum and others of the Maritime Museum staff.

RMG

Courtesy Mrs. Henry Voelker



Captain J.C. Lass and family.
The author, Christine Lass Voelker, is on the right.
The photograph was taken at Aberdeen (Grays Harbor) where *Kailua* was loading. This was the last time the family saw Captain Lass.

My father, Captain Johannes C. Lass, came from Germany, as did my mother. They became engaged before he came to this country. Father was a seafaring man, but mother thought that would not be much of a life for a family and urged him to look up her brother in Chicago and try and find some other line of work. He didn't hit it off with her brother and came to the Pacific Coast and went back to sea. He came down from Alaska one time; and mother came out from Chicago and they were married in San Francisco.

My mother's sister also lived in San Francisco. She was a seamstress — you didn't buy clothes off the rack in those days. She would work a week at a time in different persons' homes. She sewed for some people by the name of Berenson, and they introduced her to the Rolphs. It was my aunt who brought my father to Mr. Rolph's attention. In order to get a position as captain of the three-mast schooner G.W. WATSON, my father had to buy shares in her. They cost \$1800, a lot of money for young people in those days. He borrowed it.

When father was captain of the *Watson* we sometimes took trips with him. One time we went to San Diego by steamer and sailed back with him. Another time my mother and we three children — Annie, my brother William and myself — sailed down to the Hawaiian Islands. This was the only way we would see our father — he was gone for such long periods of time.

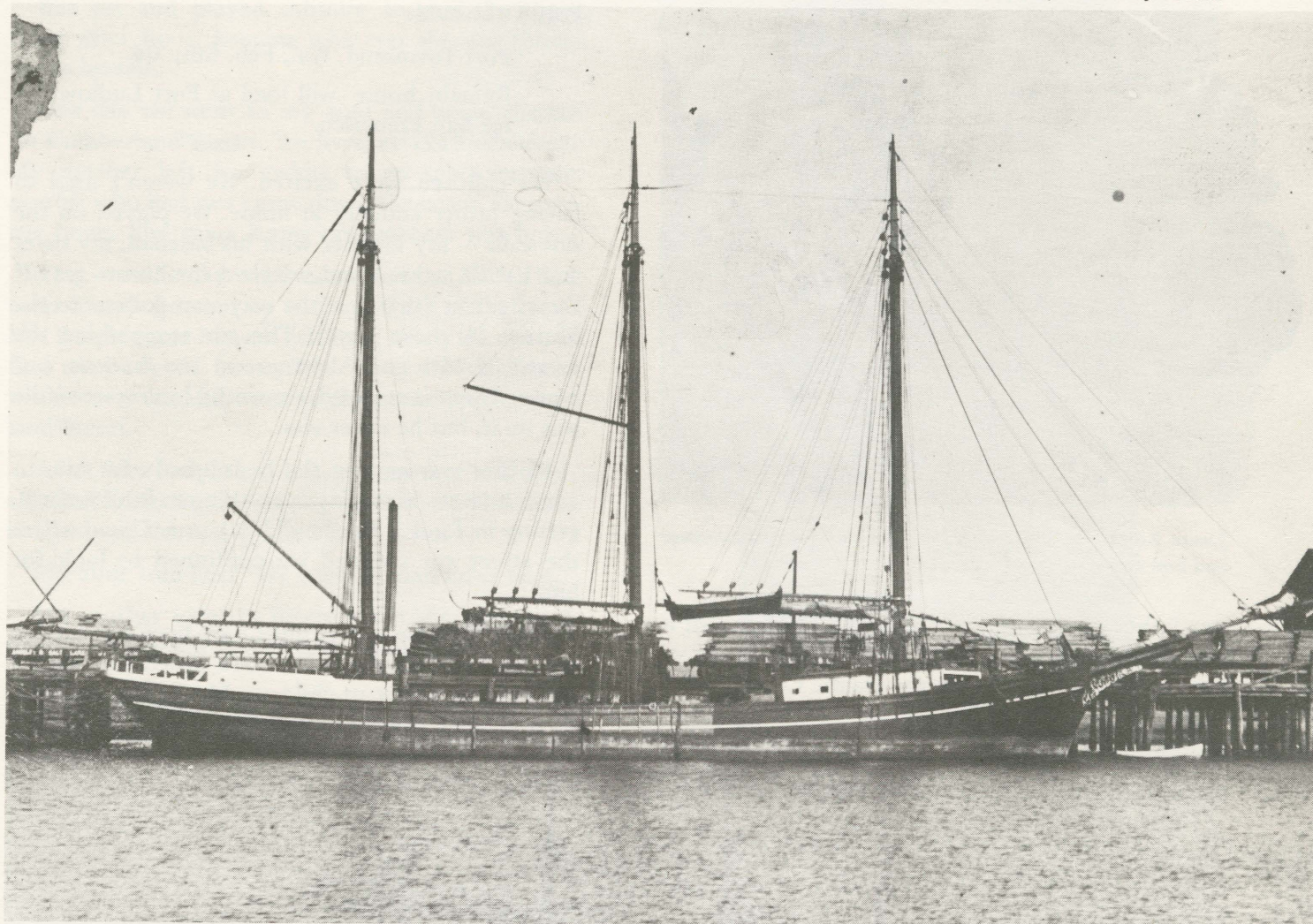
The trip to Hawaii lasted twenty-one days — a long time for kids to be on a ship. I can remember sitting on a hatch and cutting out paper dolls from illustrations in a fashion magazine. We missed some of our paper dolls once and later found that the canary had pulled them into his cage.

The Japanese cook was nice to us; he would bring us cookies when we were playing on deck. When we arrived in Hawaii and were lying at anchor, the cook taught my brother to fish. When we went back and forth to shore we were rowed in one of the ship's boats.

In port, in Hawaii, we saw a four-masted schooner lying at anchor, spanking new. We said to father: "That's the one you ought to have."

The schooner was the *Kailua*. In due course Mr. Rolph, who owned both her and the *Watson*, gave

Courtesy Mrs. Henry Voelker



(above) *G.W. Watson*, built by Bendixen in 1890, was Captain Lass' first command for Mr. Rolph.

(below) Slade Lumber Co., Aberdeen, Washington



S.F.M.M., Harry Dring Collection

Courtesy Mrs. Henry Voelker



Captains in the lumber trade. Captain Lass of the *G.W. Watson* is top row, center.



James Rolph, Jr., ship owner, ship builder, mayor, governor and bon vivant.

my father the command. We were very proud; it was our understanding that the *Kailua* was one of the largest four-masters on the Pacific Coast.

Father took her with lumber around Cape Horn. We went to Grays Harbor when she was loading, to see him before he sailed. After this voyage *Kailua*

returned to Puget Sound. My mother was going up to see him, but he sent the following telegram from Port Townsend:

“Port Townsend, Wa., Feb. 6th, '04.

Remain home will load at Port Ludlow for San Francisco.

Lass”

We children were excited. We weren't used to having father actually at home. We played on the sidewalk — my brother with his baseball, my sister and I with jacks — and watched for him to get off the streetcar (that was the way you got out to the Mission in those days). The car stopped on the corner of 24th and Alabama not too far from our house. When it stopped, we would look to see if he was on it, but he never was.

Mother was getting the house ready for him to come home — arranging everything to look its best, getting in food — but he didn't come. Down where the street car stopped we continued to look for him.

More time passed. It must have been terrible for my mother, but she didn't look upset. She wasn't the kind to worry us children. Maybe she confided in my older sister, but she concealed her alarm from my brother and me. There was no telephone except in the drugstore at the corner across from



Port Ludlow, Washington. *Kailua* loaded here on her last, ill-fated, trip.

where the streetcar stopped. My mother would go there and phone the office for news. No news.

She sat and played solitaire to pass the time. Hour after hour, keeping whatever she was thinking to herself.

One day we went to my aunt and uncle's house on Cumberland Street. We lived at 1218 Alabama. My mother left for awhile to go see a captain nearby who had just come down the coast. He gave her hope. She came home saying there was hope.

That was the day word came that the *Kailua* had been found. Bottom up with no trace of the crew. Mr. Rolph came himself with the news. He did not find anybody at home, but asked the neighbors where we were and went to the house on Cumberland Street.

After Mr. Rolph had left, my mother returned, all cheerful from visiting the captain. As she came in the door, she said she had good news.

My aunt told her: "We have the bad news here."

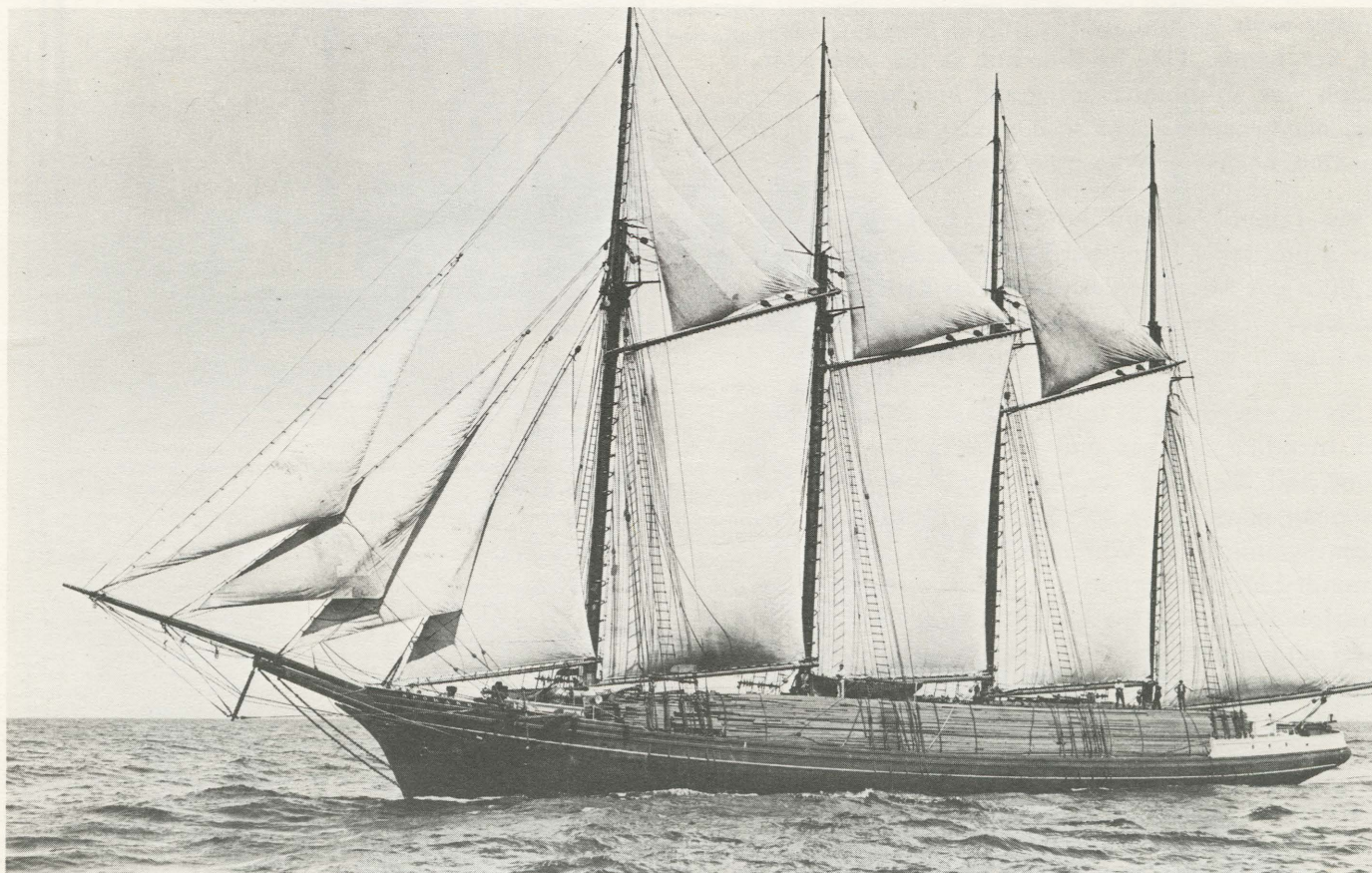
My mother went to pieces when she heard it. I remember that she had to have medication.

Several days later there was a newspaper story which gave new hope that the crew might have escaped death. My mother consoled herself with it for a little while longer.

the SERVICE TO ALICE ISLAND
Crew May Be Safe.
There is a chance that the crew of the four-masted schooner *Kailua* escaped death when their vessel was lost on the coast of Vancouver Island. The tugs *Sea Lion* and *Pioneer* called at Clayoquot this morning on their way to the scene of the wreck, and their masters reported speaking a collier while on the way up the coast from Port Townsend, and the crew of that vessel reported to them that they had sighted a four-masted schooner in distress off the Vancouver coast. This report leads to the impression that the crew of the vessel would have had ample time to leave their schooner before she would have turned turtle or reached the shore.

But nothing came of it. Then there was one last piece in the paper.

Cargo Intact.
The schooner *Kailua*, which is wrecked at Puget Sound, is breaking to pieces, but the cargo of lumber is in good condition. An effort will be made to save the cargo. The hull and the stern are both badly stove in and no hope is entertained for the saving of the schooner.



Four masted schooner *Spokane* leaving a Washington lumber port with a typically heavy deckload.

My mother was thirty-six when she was widowed. My father was forty-three. My mother supported herself from that time on. We children were 8, 10 and 12.

Recently I had a young friend lose her husband; it was one of those marriages where one is wrapped up in the other, where the husband is the whole world to the wife. It revived painful memories, I can tell you.

There had been an insurance agent, a very insistent young man (which I guess you have to be to sell insurance), and he had persuaded my father to take out a \$2,000 life insurance policy. That was a very fortunate thing. But there was trouble for my mother in claiming this without proof of death. It dragged on. Finally, Mr. Rolph had a young man from the office go with my mother to the insurance company and the claim was honored.

Mr. Rolph had promised that he would transfer the shares in the *Watson* to the *Kailua*, but he hadn't got around to it before she was lost. My mother went to him, asking him to take the shares off her hands. This he did, but at his price. Mr. Rolph was an understanding and kindhearted person, maybe a little less so if money was involved. But then he was of Scotch descent, wasn't he?

My father's sister's husband, Ludwig Koenig, was a builder. My mother borrowed an additional \$2,000 and Mr. Koenig moved our little house to the back of the lot and built two income flats in the front.

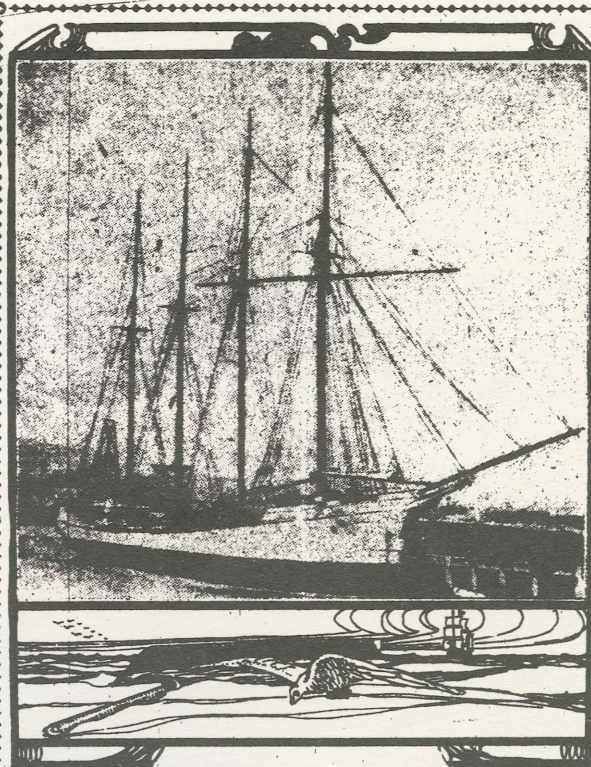
My mother kept in touch with Mrs. Rolph. She did mending for her and between that kind of work and the little rent she could get from the flats, she made the grade. She gave all three of us a business education. When William was 15, mother reminded Mr. Rolph that he had promised to find a position for him. This he did, taking him by the hand and introducing him at the Alexander and Baldwin office, where William started as an office boy. He rose to be purchasing agent, had charge of a department, and worked there all his life.

Where the *Kailua* was lost, the west coast of Vancouver Island, is the most dangerous shore on the Pacific Coast. It was said that the cargo had been too heavy; that the *Kailua* had loaded too

much lumber; and that the company had pressed my father: "When are you leaving? When are you leaving?" Maybe my father left against his better judgment; later the company issued orders that captains should load their own cargos — to judge for themselves how much lumber it was safe to take on board. But really we did not know about these things; it was all hearsay.

S.F. Chronicle, April 7, 1904

SCHOONER TURNS TURTLE IN GALE



Four-Masted Schooner Kailua. Found Bottom Up Off Vancouver Island.

THE fine schooner *Kailua*, owned by Hind, Rolph & Co. of this city, is a wreck off the coast of Vancouver Island. The vessel left Port Ludlow, Puget Sound, on March 8th for this city with a cargo of 955,600 feet of lumber. The *Kailua* passed out of Juan de Fuca straits in the teeth of a tremendous gale, and her failure to arrive here within a reasonable time caused considerable anxiety. A telegram received at the Merchants' Exchange late yesterday afternoon from Victoria reported that the *Kailua* was found bottomside up off Kyuquot, 110 miles northwest of Cape Flattery, and not far from the place where the schooner *Emma Utter* was wrecked a few months ago. The telegram states that there was no sign of survivors.

The *Kailua* was one of the best of the big four-masted schooners on this Coast. She was commanded by Captain J. C. Lass, whose family lives in this city. The other men on board when she left Port Ludlow were: First Mate W. Hollmann; Second Mate Kaiser; Seamen B. Hansen, W. Paulsen, H. Nelson, C. Abrahamsen, W. Kanzler and P. Olsen, and T. Takulani, the Japanese cook. The *Kailua* was built in 1900 at Hoquiam, Wash., by G. H. Hitchings, and had a net tonnage of 653, with a length of 182.5 feet, breadth of 38.5 feet and a depth of 14.5 feet.

MUSEUM ACQUIRES GILL NET BOAT AND "IRON CHINK"

Earlier this year the Maritime Museum was fortunate to obtain examples of two pieces of equipment that were of great historic importance to the century old Alaska salmon fishery in Bristol Bay. Through freelance movie photographers Scott Carter and Carl Alto, who brought their existence to our attention, and through Group Vice President Robert Fly and Chris Norgaard of Del Monte Corporation who made it possible to acquire and transport them, the Museum now owns a Bristol Bay gill net boat and an "Iron Chink". Both of these pieces of equipment could have been transported to Bristol Bay as deck cargo or in the hold of our own *Balclutha*. For *Balclutha* made the trip north each spring for 28 years, carrying fishermen, cannery hands and cannery supplies and equipment for Alaska Packers Association, now a division of Del Monte Corporation.

Until 1951, the gill nets that caught the salmon for the canneries of Bristol Bay could only be set from small craft powered by sail or oars. The

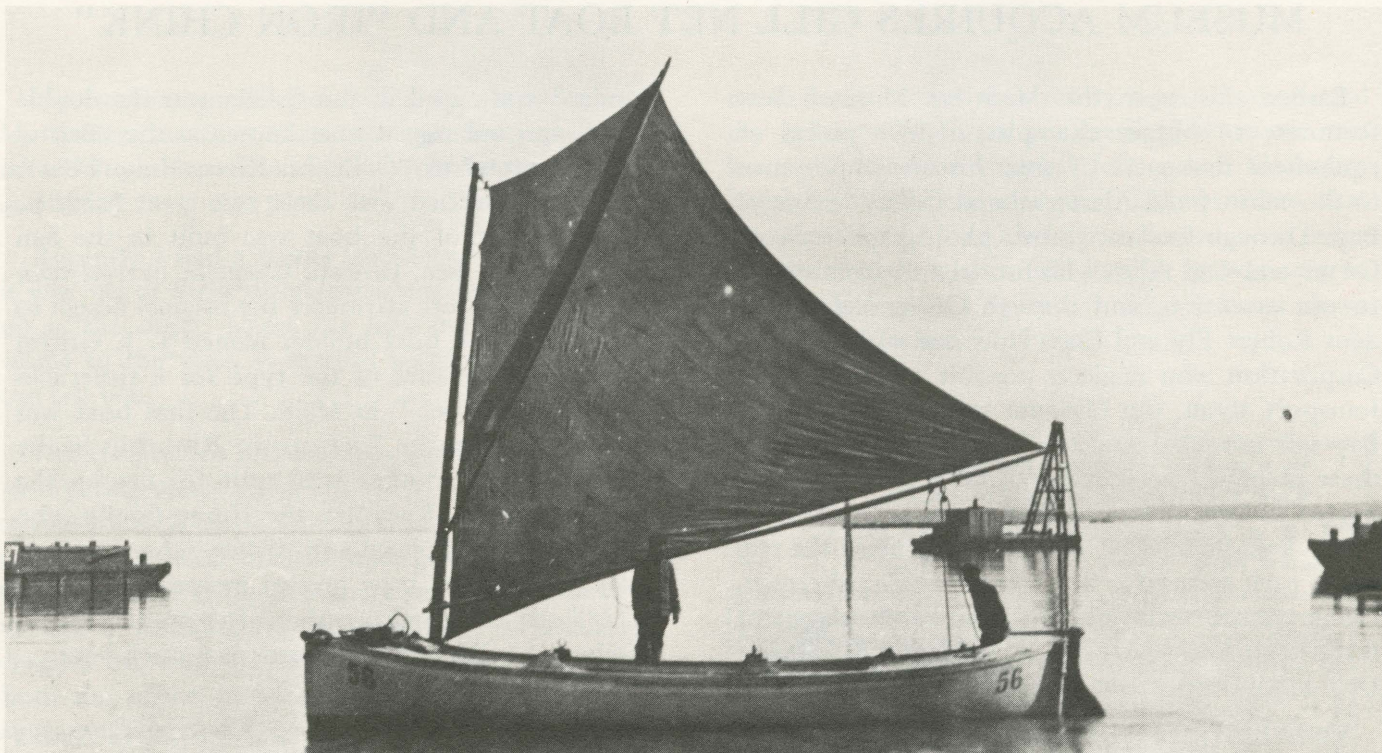
standard craft used in the fishery was the double ended, spritsail rigged boat known as the "Bristol Bay gill netter" or "Columbia River salmon boat". Although identified with these two great fisheries, the prototype of the boat was built in the San Francisco bay area. Howard Chapelle, in *American Small Sailing Craft* attributes the original design to a San Francisco boat builder named J. J. Griffin who "built the first of the type for a fisherman called 'Greek Joe' " in 1868. The first boat was built for use on the Sacramento River but in the following year another was built for use on the lower Columbia River by the Hume family who had pioneered the salmon fishery there several years before. The type proved eminently successful in both areas and was thereafter produced by a number of builders in both areas as a stock boat.

When the salmon fishery was opened in Alaska in the late 1870's, the "Columbia River" salmon boat was shipped north and it became the univer-

Gill netters towing to the fishing grounds. The empty fish wells can be seen on the boat in the left foreground. They were placed forward and aft and on both sides of the centerboard well.

S.F.M.M., Johannesen Collection





S.F.M.M., A. Larsen Collection

(above) Rigged up and waiting for a tow to the fishing grounds.

(below) A brisk offshore breeze with the spritsail yard removed. Note the angle of the boom in this picture and compare it with the picture above.

S.F.M.M., Omli Collection



sally used gill net boat in the cannery fleets both in Southern Alaska and later in Bristol Bay.

The design as it finally evolved for Alaskan use was approximately 28 feet long (the original Columbia River boats were 22 to 23 feet long) almost 9 feet in beam and had more freeboard than the original version. It had a centerboard and carried a spritsail rig but could be rowed with relative ease by two men. In case of storm the spritsail boom could be quickly removed and the sail area reduced by almost a third. With the advent of motorized fishing in Bristol Bay in 1951, the boat could no longer be efficiently used and the fleets were sold off or laid up in sheds at the canneries. The Museum considers itself fortunate to have acquired one of the last of this important type, which Chapelle credits with being one of the few western small craft whose development was strictly local and cannot be attributed to an eastern origin.

While the job of manning the Bristol Bay gill net boats was dominated by Italian and Scandinavian fishermen, work in the canneries in the early days was almost the exclusive province of the Chinese. The work of sliming, cleaning, trimming and butchering the salmon was entirely done by hand, and although the Chinese cannery hands were adept at their work and were paid "starvation" wages, the work was time consuming and inefficient compared to the rest of the canning process.

During the winter of 1903-1904 a Canadian sometime cook and eating house proprietor, named E. A. Smith, invented a machine that became the single greatest contribution to efficient cannery operations. Smith's invention mechanically performed most of the cleaning and dressing operation and eventually was refined and modified to process over 3000 fish an hour. It was an extraordinary labor saving device, and the 320 lb. Smith, noted for his frontier sense of humor, dubbed his invention the "Iron Chink".

Incidentally, ethnic humor was much in vogue in the 19th century, and few nationalities escaped popular nicknames or being the butt of ethnic jokes. Another piece of equipment with an ethnic nickname was the diminutive steam engine that hauled the cars loaded with fill for such areas as Mission Bay and the sea wall. These narrow gauge engines replaced the man power of the largely Irish railroad gangs of the period and thus, presumably, acquired their nickname of "Steam Paddies".



S.F.M.M., P. Larsen Collection

(above) Sailing to the fishing grounds in a light breeze. Taken at Naknek, Alaska, probably in the early 1930's.

(below) Rafted up and comparing notes on the catch, these fishermen have rigged shelters with spritsail yard, boom crutch and canvas.

S.F.M.M., Omli Collection



HUGO SHOWS THEM HOW



Photo, Karl Kortum

"Speaking of the old way of doing things — in the *Alexander Isenberg* we sent all three gallant masts down before breakfast. We started at turn-to time in the morning, six o'clock, and by eight o'clock had all of them down. Of course we had rigged up to do this the day before..." This was Hugo Nabel speaking. Hugo, 84, had four roundings of Cape Horn behind him, the first in the German four masted bark *Pamir* in 1906, and many years of coasting experience in the Pacific before he joined Union Iron Works as a rigger. He later became boss rigger at Barnes and Tibbitts, Alameda in 1920.

That was 56 years ago, but Hugo's memory is excellent, and his expertise was invaluable as *Balclutha* sent down her old t'gallants and sent up new ones this past spring.

For Jim Williams and his crew on *Balclutha*, Hugo rehearsed every step, calling on all those years of experience. Hugo's advice was thoroughly appreciated, for there is a world of difference between sending down a working ship's masts with a sizeable ship's crew who has done the job dozens of times before, and performing the task for the

first time on a 90 year old museum ship, working with t'gallants weakened by dry rot and supported by standing rigging of questionable strength. The new masts, cut and turned in Portland, Oregon by Niedermeyer-Martin, were finished by Gary Adair and Ron Brown of *Balclutha's* crew. The mizzen and main t'gallants were sent up and rigged in the spring and the fore t'gallant will go up this fall.



Photo, Karl Kortum

(above left) Hugo Nabel explains some of the finer points of sending down the t'gallants to John Ewald and Rocky Harris.

(above) *Balclutha's* manager Jim Williams and rigger Dave Spaulding with the old main t'gallant mast. Dry rot had penetrated to a depth of 6 inches in the doubling.

BALCLUTHA'S CREW

As the years go by, there are fewer and fewer old timers like Hugo Nabel around who learned the rigger's trade at sea in commercial sail or at work in the rigging lofts along the waterfront. One would think, then, that it would be difficult to find good men to work on a ship like *Balclutha*.

We are fortunate that there exists a floating pool of fellows in their 20's who love the sea and want to learn these almost forgotten skills. They come to *Balclutha* with all levels of background and experience. Some arrive with nothing but a romantic curiosity about large sailing ships, and a willingness to learn. Others have served their apprenticeship at places like Mystic Seaport or have worked on the refurbished trading schooners and galeasses of the Baltic. Still others have just spent time around boats and the sea.

A *Balclutha* crew member's work runs the

gamut, from such mundane tasks as sanding and varnishing and chipping paint to the more sophisticated skills needed in renewing rigging such as splicing, seizing, serving and tarring. He may even find himself down in the engine room of *Eppleton Hall* working on her unique single side lever grasshopper engines, machinery that probably cannot be found in operating condition in any other place in the world.

Inevitably, most of our crew move on: Rich Childress as mate on the *Georg Stage* in Denmark; Gary Adair on his way to Mystic by sea; John Ewald, manager of the *Falls of Clyde* in Honolulu; Dave Spaulding in Alaska. But, frequently as not, we will see them back again, for a few months or a year; and inevitably new people come through bringing varying levels of skills to be put to use and shared.



Balclutha's crew, spring 1976.

From left to right: Tim Przygocki, Gary Adair, Tom McCarthy, Ship Manager Jim Williams, Rigger Dave Spaulding, Ship's Clerk John Ewald, Gino Harris, Assistant Rigger Rocky Harris, Mike Harris, Nelson Chenkin, Jamie Falkowski, Ron Brown.

Flottbek's crew, about 1900. It was commonplace, when in port, to have a group picture of the crew taken. The Maritime Museum's photographic collection contains numerous pictures of ships' crews gathered for formal photographs. This one of the crew of the German ship *Flottbek* was taken near Tacoma by Wilhelm Hester around the turn of the century.



S.F.M.M., Hester Collection

FRIENDS OF THE EPPLETON HALL

Organized in 1975, the Friends of the Eppleton Hall is a group within the Maritime Museum's membership that was formed to participate in the refurbishment and maintenance in steaming condition of our unique Tyne River paddle wheel tug.

After making her way from Newcastle to San Francisco on her own bottom under the command of her intrepid captain, Scott Newhall, "*Eppie*" went into a decline. Only much vigorous massage from many devoted hands, notably those of Trustees Walter S. Newhall and Robert Blake and ship manager Jim Williams, brought her back to a healthy condition last year. She is now fully certified by the Coast Guard and makes her appearance on the Bay in celebration of auspicious occasions. She last steamed on the third and fourth of July in celebration of the Bi-Centennial. Several trips are planned for the fall.

Substantial work and a fair amount of financing is needed to keep "*Eppie*" in certified running condition. The Friends have provided much of

both for the past year. Many of them are steam buffs and have enjoyed working on a pair of engines which were built in 1914 but whose design dates back prior to 1850, evoking images of the *Great Western*, the *Great Britain* and the Collins Line paddle wheelers that pioneered steam crossings of the Atlantic in the 1840's. The Friends have also had first call on most of *Eppleton Hall's* bay cruises, and this reward for interest and involvement has proved very popular; so much so that "*Eppie*" has seldom ventured forth without a full passenger complement.

Friends of the Eppleton Hall now number seventy-one, and qualifications for membership are an interest in "*Eppie*" and a willingness to contribute \$10 or more to the special fund for her maintenance. An occasional newsletter is sent out by secretary Bill Graham, and members are notified of all prospective workdays and steamings. Anyone interested in joining can contact the Museum Office, or Jim Williams on *Balclutha*.

TRAVEL GRANT FOR LIBRARIAN HULL

This spring the Maritime Museum's Librarian, Dave Hull, was the recipient of a travel grant under the National Museum Act which is administered by the Smithsonian Institute. The grant enabled Dave to travel to twenty Museum Libraries in the East and Mid-west and review their operating philosophy and techniques. This honor was in many ways

an outgrowth of Dave's recent paper, "A Survey of Museum Libraries in the United States", which was published in the July issue of the journal *Special Libraries*. Dave's trip, which took him to thirteen cities in six weeks, has given him an opportunity to examine first-hand the solutions that others have brought to common problems.

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SEA LETTER

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